



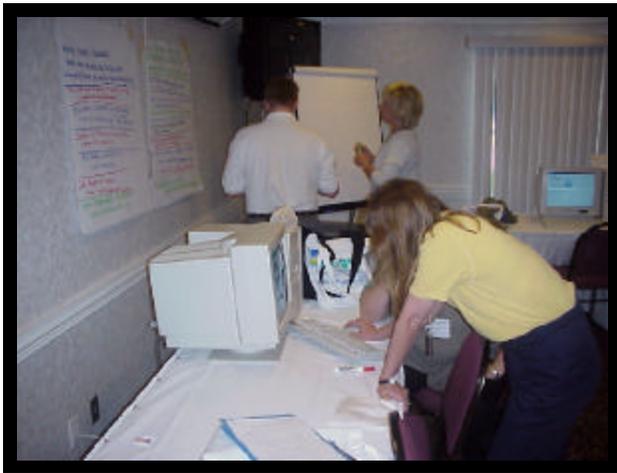
AN INTRODUCTION TO THESE PROCEEDINGS

In April 2000, over 200 people gathered in Austin, Texas for the sixth national volunteer monitoring conference. Most of the participants were volunteer program coordinators representing watershed groups, state & local governments, universities, and environmental organizations. The theme of the conference—*Moving Into the Mainstream*—illustrates the evolving role of volunteer monitoring throughout the country. Increasingly, we are being accepted as an integral part of the “mainstream” monitoring community.

The Austin conference was designed for new and experienced volunteer program coordinators and emphasized information sharing and exploring better ways to move our programs into the mainstream.

Across the country, volunteers participate in local watershed monitoring, including biological, physical and chemical monitoring; land use surveys; and stream walks. But they are also active in debris cleanups, restoration, storm drain stenciling, tracking permit compliance, maintaining telephone hotlines, and a variety of other community outreach activities. The fifth edition of the *National Directory of Volunteer Environmental Monitoring Programs*¹ reflects the energy, imagination, and dedication of the tens of thousands of volunteers across the country who participate in these environmental monitoring projects.

The number of active volunteer groups has grown from 517 in 1994, to 772 upon publication of the newest edition of the *Directory* in 1998. Volunteers monitor lakes, streams, estuaries, groundwater, air, and many other environments all over the country. This national conference, *Moving Into the Mainstream*, gave both new and established volunteer groups a chance to share common questions, answers, problems, solutions, and successes.



This proceedings document is evidence of the enormous richness of volunteer monitoring activities around the country. Conference sessions focused on a variety of topics including innovative techniques and methods (water clarity, wetlands assessments, bacteria), program development and management (study design, quality assurance, outreach strategies), national issues and concerns (TMDLs, sustainable growth), coordination and networking (regional breakouts, service providers, state coordination). This document should serve as an information resource and networking tool for volunteer monitors and program

coordinators. It is also proof positive that volunteer monitoring is, indeed, *moving into the mainstream*.

¹Ely, Eleanor & E. Hamingson. 1998. *National Directory of Volunteer Environmental Monitoring Programs*. EPA Publication # 841-B-98-009. Printed version available at no charge from NSCEP, (800)490-9198. Available online at: www.epa.gov/owow/monitoring/vol.html





Opening comments from Steven Hubbell of the Lower Colorado River Authority

It is my pleasure and my privilege to welcome you to Texas, to the Colorado River watershed, and to Austin. I hear the field trips went well. I've heard reports so far of bats and buzzards, snakes and tarantulas. Throw in a scorpion and a cactus, an enchilada, some barbecue and a big margarita and you can call it a trip.

I can't tell you how much I've looked forward to this gathering. I know my tendency is to rush madly through an intense opportunity like this and wonder, when it's over, how it passed so quickly. I challenge and encourage you all to cherish these friends and to savor this moment in time.

Well, we're "Moving Into the Mainstream." We've worked for years, decades in some cases, to refine our techniques and to improve our ability to gather useful information. We have made considerable progress toward influencing environmental management decisions. Volunteer data are used in 305b reports and 303d listings, and many of our professional monitoring colleagues have come to recognize the value of our efforts. The iron is hot, and we have before us the opportunity to not only be contributors to the future integrity of our waters, but to help lead the way.



Sometimes, in the muck and mire of having to defend and justify the existence of our programs, it is easy to become discouraged. Sometimes we get so entangled in the P's and Q's of QAPP's that we wonder why we bother. A couple of months ago, I spoke to a group of 50-something senior women at a gathering of the Killeen Chapter of the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs.

At the end of the presentation about connections between conservation and water quality, I was stunned by the warm and generous reception. Some of the members simply thanked me for my time, a few had true confessions of water waste habits they pledged to improve, and some of the women praised me for presenting concepts that they knew intuitively but had never been able to articulate. But one of the members said something that inspired and fortified me in a way I had not anticipated: she simply said, "With all we hear about the problems facing the environment, it's encouraging to know that someone is doing something about it. Thank you." Though she spoke to me, she was talking to you and to all of the volunteers we represent. Thank you for being the people who are doing something about it.





Thoughts on improving the next National Conference (from participant evaluations)...

- ☞ More discussion/problem solving/brainstorming sessions
- ☞ Discussion/training on specific topics (creative fund raising, educating & dealing w/ specific groups – legislators, Ag community, etc.)
- ☞ More interactive sessions – hands-on training sessions in the field
- ☞ More localizing of issues...need more “How to” do things and implement programs

- ☞ Too many concurrent sessions without repeats, maybe video tape sessions and sell the tapes
- ☞ Provide more specifics about city’s (in this case, Austin’s) environmental programs

- ☞ Sessions should focus on strategies for improving, sustaining, & advancing existing programs
- ☞ Give out or sell Conference T-shirts
- ☞ Add sessions on training & communication for trainers & volunteers
- ☞ Add Breakfast Session for Role Breakouts (government, non-profit organizations, primary schools, etc.) modeled after the Regional Breakouts
- ☞ Provide abstracts of presentations before going to workshops
- ☞ Add session on Political Skill Building

What conference goes liked best (from participant evaluations)...

- ☞ Great to have so many people in attendance – Austin is a great place to visit in April
- ☞ People brought their publications and generously shared them...thank you, thank you, thank you...loved these people, very comfortable, welcoming, sharing, friendly, conference
- ☞ Just meeting other volunteer coordinators and learning what other groups do and the problems encountered was extremely helpful for me because I have just started
- ☞ Both Mateo & Dani were very informative. I thoroughly enjoyed it...We toured 5 creeks in 4 hours! (Austin Creeks)





- ☞ There was time to talk...exhibitor's wares were available for viewing and there were opportunities for questions and discussion



- ☞ Best! I really learned a lot, plus got to see the area (Innovative BMPs in Austin)
- ☞ Good information and great networking opportunities
- ☞ Good atmosphere...saw a lot of old friends
- ☞ The Eco-Coffee House was great fun!
- ☞ Good to see that the pros are wrestling with the same questions we are (NWQMC Final Session)
- ☞ Good diversity of sessions...I liked the "panel" vs. 1 person speaking
- ☞ Enjoyed workshops on other types of monitoring such as wetlands, phytoplankton,

shoreline type

- ☞ Outstanding! Great local leaders...beautiful area & grotto... (Hamilton Pool & Westcave Preserve)
- ☞ Range of topics to choose from & the Regional breakout was a wonderful surprise!
- ☞ Nico, our tour guide, was very enthusiastic & knowledgeable. We all had a great time! (Area Springs & Sinkholes)
- ☞ The availability of funding to help speakers come to the Conference
- ☞ Learning what topics are "hot" with volunteer groups
- ☞ Opportunity to learn about latest successes, issues, & challenges in volunteer monitoring
- ☞ Jason was a great leader for our group – informed & excited about the local area and the trip (Barton Creek)
- ☞ The relaxed & open nature of the Conference
- ☞ The people were active, friendly, & committed to good science in citizen monitoring programs
- ☞ *Obvious enthusiasm on the part of all participants...doing something meaningful and taking "direct action"...refreshing to see pride in environmentalism!*

